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ABSTRACT

Liberal learning, preparation for career development, and even first-job skills can be acquired in a liberal arts college since they are compatible components. This paper focuses on the need to integrate career education into liberal arts colleges. Emphasis is placed on strategies for liberal arts colleges for liberal learning and career development. Part one discusses the case for accountability and the need for this integration. Part two discusses the persistent pursuit of ways to liberal learning. Part three reviews how to serve directly, the career needs of students in a liberal arts college. (MJM)

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LIBERAL ARTS AND CAREER EDUCATION: MUST THEY BE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

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II. Strategies for Liberal Arts Colleges for Liberal Learning and Career Development Today

1. The call for accountability

Many liberal arts colleges are now being challenged to relate their programs more directly to the career objectives of students. Both critics and defenders have frequently concluded that such an emphasis on career concerns can only be realized with the compromise of liberal learning. My assertion, however, is that both career-related learning and liberal learning have been neglected in many colleges and universities and that they can be compatible. Both, moreover, must be included in those undergraduate programs organized around the offerings of traditional academic departments and majors in the academic disciplines. Their mutual inclusion is necessary in order to realize a re-orientation of educational goals to fill new needs as well as long-valued objectives.

In acceptance of the Carnegie Commission call for "more options," I am focusing on only one of a number of valid postsecondary alternatives. That alternative is the one I am most familiar with and the one about which there is most controversy in regard to liberal learning and career preparation--the liberal arts college. That designation is commonly applied to any four-year undergraduate institution in which faculty, courses, and academic programs are organized

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according to traditional academic disciplines. The emphasis of my concern, however, is not on the classical prototype for elite students but on the more numerous public and private colleges and larger universities with arts and sciences faculties.

The campus on which I now work asks each candidate for the bachelors degree to present a major in an academic department. Less than five per cent of the graduates to date, however, have gone on to graduate study in any one of the disciplines although about twenty per cent have gone on to professional school. It is a young suburban branch campus of a state university. Its students are typically first generation college in their families. Many take the arts and sciences route more by default than by choice because of the absence of professional degrees. It is characterized by a gap between the expectation of the faculty and those of many students. Some of the latter are what Patricia Cross has designated as "new students" in Beyond the Open Door.

I must hasten to add that I mention my present institution, University of Maryland Baltimore County, not because we have found the answers but because it does typify the problems, and we are grappling with the questions.

The operational definition of liberal arts colleges as those with academic departments does not necessarily define liberal learning nor is it always present in desired measure in every liberal arts college. Without getting mired in the

rhetoric that can be traced from Aristotle through Mark Van Doren, we can say for our purpose here that ideal liberal learning is that which aims to produce

... a person educated in the major modes of literacy, linguistic and quantitative;

... a person who has the capability of intellectual inquiry through conceptual thinking, observation and analysis;

... a person who has the capability of experiencing and partaking of the world of culture and the arts with a sense of discrimination;

... a person who has a sense of historical and cultural context with which to comprehend and order his or her experienced world;

... and, finally, a person with a developed capacity of mind for finding and effecting his or her chosen major life roles, the principal ones of those to be served by collegiate learning being work and citizenship--and the role of private person with values and tastes which can also be served by mind.

Liberal learning and career preparation so considered are inextricable, but the sad fact is that too few liberal arts colleges achieve the above goals except fractionally. This is not because they are staffed with teachers and administrators with evil or neglectful intentions toward students. The forces of resistance, however, are persistent and endemic. These institutions and American higher education have produced a large number of academicians who resist such needs by virtue of their professional training and the demands of their professional life. Added to these forces in the institutions we are dealing with are many students who do not have a culturally-derived readiness or desire for

liberal learning and who do have a narrow, inadequate sense of career preparation.

Before I move into some strategies for the achievement of liberal learning and career preparation, I should indicate the sense in which I am using the term, career preparation. In a liberal arts college, it should ideally consist of:

... awareness of work roles in society and the ways in which they are chosen and prepared for--particularly in those broad areas to which the student is attracted (e.g. management, health services, communications, the arts, science, law and government, etc.);

... an accurate sense in the student of his or her own strengths and interests which are capable of motivation to productive effort and a tentative focusing of them toward a specific or general area of endeavor as mentioned above;

... accomplishment of the liberal intellectual capabilities described above;

... selection of a major which seems most suitable for developing known personal interests and strengths, which the student will utilize and adapt, not simply submit to;

... accomplishment of prerequisite courses necessary for likely future training;

... field experience in trial efforts at likely work areas, and with work as such;

... one or more specialized job skills appropriate for a first job such as accounting, statistics, laboratory techniques, economic analysis, survey techniques, computer programming, social research, writing, interviewing, effective speech, studio art technique, etc.;

... and, lastly, job-finding skills, developed through practice and through a sound knowledge of the functioning of the job market.

All of these can be developed in a liberal arts college. The summative competence and the only sure thing for the long run is, of course, adaptive readiness and capability. That may be as much a matter of temperament as training, but it must be learned by many, because the soundest projection of manpower analysis is that most college-trained people may expect to experience several major work changes in a lifetime. Even a person who moves up through a single large-scale organization to higher management levels will experience major shifts in the character of work performed. Therefore, to organize an entire educational program around skills needed for the first job would be a crippling limitation for a person who is capable of more.

2. The persistent pursuit of ways to liberal learning

As suggested above, the search for ways to maintain liberal learning in the liberal arts college is perpetual. The reward structure of the system diverts the interest of faculty. The goals of many faculty, students and parents are even antithetical to liberal learning. Committed leadership, however, among faculty, administration and even trustees and state higher education councils could effect a revival of general education and generate a spirit to maintain it.

What if a state higher education council added to its accountability standards guidelines for the maintenance of liberal learning and career preparation, as we have defined them, for all public four-year liberal arts colleges? An

institution might respond to such a mandate with policy and budgetary commitments to accomplish some of the following:

... the holding of departments accountable for general education qualities in their lower division courses and for designating which upper division courses are professional in the discipline;

... establishment of the principle that teaching students in the disciplines who predominantly are not going to pursue them professionally is not an affliction but a high intellectual and pedagogical calling;

... development of optional general education courses around complex issues beyond the reach of one discipline--issues of a general social nature which may relate to the concerns or experience of students, but in the investigation of which students may develop the general skills of intellectual inquiry and expression, a corollary goal being that they learn the need for intellectual disciplines in ordering, explaining and dealing with the experienced world. Examples would be--

- o a range of courses dealing with work and major areas of human endeavor, perhaps starting with a comprehensive interdisciplinary look at work as a central human phenomenon, but also offering investigation into the functioning, for example, of the health delivery system as a complex of work roles with knowledge systems and skills;
- o courses which deal with the nature of the international and cross-cultural world, how we live with it and struggle with it, with some attention to what work roles might be concerned with it;
- o the arts in mass-pop culture;
- o an investigation of the complex accomplishment of planning new towns or rehabilitating old ones.

I am calling for something difficult and the struggle is not a new one. Since my undergraduate days nearly 40 years ago, I have been aware of the persistent paradox between the intellectual professionalism of the disciplines and the

general education needs of undergraduate students. It is a paradox because sound knowledge cannot derive without disciplines; yet they persistently engender a range of forces resistant to intellectual synthesis. The strategies of meeting that dilemma should vary to take account of the times and the particular needs of the current student constituency.

A general education approach focused on work as a dominant mode of human life and expression is intellectually valid and would serve as a foundation for career training for a changing work world. Sound knowledge about one's strengths and values, an understanding of the place of work in human life, and awareness of the possible range of application of personal talents are good places to start with career training. In this way, work may become a creative and productive expression of oneself.

3. How to serve directly the career needs of students in a liberal arts college

Academic leadership should hold academic departments and learning support units accountable for serving particular career needs of students. As already indicated, this could be an accountability factor set by a state council of higher education. Particular strategies might include the following:

... explicit attention by departments to identify job applicability of course-learned skills, for example, social survey and data analysis techniques learned in sociology to market research and other commercial uses;

... courses dealing with individual development and how people find their work roles are available on some campuses now; some lead to the identification by students of personal strengths which when implemented and focused may point to work; they should also cover learning how to use university and external resources in that implementation;

... short-term minimester courses which enable students to check out areas of work in specific terms, identify relevant skills, develop a personal plan of career preparation and learn how to deal with the job market--examples would be general management skills, the health field, the communications industry, the arts, etc.;

... the identification of clusters of career-related courses from regular offerings of departments which when listed together have evident career relevance--an example being courses related to general management which can be taken with a choice of majors;

... special tracks in most majors related to career directions such as management economics, survey research in sociology, organization theory and industrial sociology, public management and policy analysis in political science, statistics and data processing in mathematics, etc.;

... formal, non-professional career programs that utilize courses from several departments with the addition of limited specially-designed interdisciplinary offerings--such as science, mathematics and social science courses combined to prepare people for administrative and other supporting roles in scientific research and the delivery of medical services;

... and, finally, development of special strategies and trained personnel in counseling and placement offices to support these learning objectives so these services may become complementary to formal course instruction and not viewed as non-academic agencies to deal with specialized problems.

4. Conclusions and special strategies

These and other methods can meet career needs of students without establishment of professional programs. Examples may already be found on a number of campuses around the country. Their use can provide greater adaptability in colleges to

changes in student demands, in professional requirements, and in job markets. Implicit in these methods is the assumption by the college of the obligation to aid the student in learning how to utilize its resources.

The kinds of programs I call for provide sound potentiality for professional development but do not seek to prepare individuals for particular job descriptions. Individual students, however, can gain a particular combination of skills they seek to utilize in their initial employment. If a liberal arts college attempted more than that, however, it would be moving toward the function of credentialling, and the formalization of professional schooling. Learning and credentialling are distinguishable functions which may well be separated or kept apart to the gain of each.

But are the existing departments and personnel up to meeting such demands? Many individuals are probably not. Many more, however, have the very adaptability such programs propose to produce in students and can learn under the challenge of effective leadership and budgetary inducement. The Carnegie Commission has spoken to the need for monetary support for program development in established institutions. It recommends that three per cent of annual budget be appropriated for a change support fund. In addition to the very sound intellectual and educational reasons for the strategies suggested, a number of institutions may find them constructive responses to serious enrollment problems.

Although new structures, whether departments or career divisions, can be avoided, there do need to be interdepartmental program committees for some of the suggested undertakings. A more important need may be for some specialized teaching and leadership personnel with departmental or general faculty status, chosen for personal qualities of mind, experience and talent, not for academic credentials. A senior business manager or an experienced writer, editor or publisher who can think and teach productively about their work are examples.

Some students may know in advance that their temperament and current level of intellectual curiosity are not attuned to the suggested programs. Others may try them and find that they prefer more direct and specific training for particular jobs. This is a valid choice. Many students who elect shorter-term direct vocational programs, on the other hand, may discover later on the job that they have developed some intellectual concerns. At that point, in accord with the idea of the learning society, they must be provided opportunity to return to college, under conditions they can handle, to get a program with a larger measure of liberal inquiry. Moreover, the vocational or community college career program usually does offer some liberal learning, and frequently it is quite good.

In conclusion, liberal learning, preparation for career development and even first-job skills can be acquired in a liberal arts college, and they are indeed compatible compon-

ents. It is not just that the work role is a major or dominating role in our lives. It merits attention in a truly liberalizing education so that the personal qualities and intellectual strengths of the individual can be discovered in the process and established as the basis for defining the direction of work. The work role then becomes a creative and motivated expression of self.

Public interest, moreover, calls for the continued liberal education of a significant number of people of talent for adaptive intellectual capability. If this is not accomplished, the societal adaptive capability will be impaired, a dangerous turn in a changing world. Such would be the folly of training everyone in higher education for specific positions in accord with a manpower projection of job needs. I find relevance to this issue in Howard Bowen's conclusion that "Education is an active generator of values, not merely a passive adjuster to them."*

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*Howard R. Bowen, "Manpower Management and Higher Education," Educational Record, Winter 1973.